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## MYSTICISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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The word "mysticism" has been used in many and widely different senses, but it always implies some sort of immediacy of relation between the human and the divine. Taking the term in this general sense, without attempting here to define it more narrowly, I wish to ask to what extent mysticism may be said to have existed in the early church, and in what forms it appeared. I shall confine myself to the first century and a half of the life of the church.

The earliest Christian of whose mysticism there can be no doubt is the apostle Paul. However broadly or narrowly the term may be defined, it cannot fail to include him. His mysticism is of an extreme kind. The Christian man is he in whom dwells divinity. By faith, the mystical bond of union, he is brought into complete oneness with God, so that it is no longer he that lives, but the divine Christ that lives in him (cf. Gal. 3:27; 4:19; Rom. 8; Eph. 2:22; 3:17; Col. 1:27 ff.; 3:3).

It is a genuine physical or metaphysical unity of which Paul speaks—not simply a oneness of spirit, or disposition, or will, but of substance. Jesus Christ, who is himself divine, or the Spirit of God, who is one with Christ, enters into the believer and substitutes for his fleshly nature a spiritual and divine nature, so that he is a new creature altogether. The result of the divine indwelling is not simply union, but identity. It is not that the man and Christ are brought into intimate association, but that they become one, so that the man dies with Christ unto the flesh, and rises with him unto a new life, unto the spirit; so that what Christ does he does, and what Christ has he has.

But it is not simply that Paul held a mystical theory of the Christian life; his own personal religious experience was genuinely mystical, and out of it his theory grew. Compare, for instance, what he says in Gal. 1:16: "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me" (cf. also Gal. 1:11 ff.; 2:20). And in II Cor. 12:2-4 he recounts a particular experience which is typically, we might almost say technically,

mystical and has innumerable parallels in the history of mysticism: "I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago (whether in the body I know not or whether out of the body I know not, God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or apart from the body I know not, God knoweth), how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (Cf. also II Cor. 2:6 ff. and I Cor. 14:18.)

The fruit of the union of the divine and human natures which is so emphasized in Paul's epistles is the believer's complete moral transformation. His life is no more an earthly, but a heavenly, life; no more carnal, but spiritual; no more corrupt, but holy (cf. Rom. 8:1 ff.; Gal. 5:22 ff.; Eph. 2:10; 3:14 ff.; 5:9; Phil. 2:13; 3:8 ff.; Col. 3:1 ff.).

Moreover, the Christian man—being no longer fleshly, but spiritual; no longer human only, but divine—is a free man, over whom the law has no dominion. He is in possession of the completest ethical liberty, because, being spiritual and divine, his nature is its own law and needs no other. "Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." Thus Paul's mysticism results in an ethical position of the loftiest sort—perfect holiness in perfect liberty, the moral spontaneity of a holy will. It is here that his chief interest lies. He is above all else concerned in his own and his brethren's moral perfectness, and in his mystical doctrine of the divine indwelling he finds its guarantee. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think of him as a speculative mystic, concerned primarily with religious metaphysics. He was above all a practical man, who wrote all his epistles with a practical purpose; and his mysticism, thoroughgoing as it is, was not end, but means.

The influence of Paul's thought made itself felt in the First Epistle of Peter, whose author, though not so controllingly mystical as Paul, yet reproduces, somewhat obscurely to be sure, the great apostle's mystical conception of redemption and the Christian life, and also his principle of Christian freedom (cf. I Pet. 2:16, 24; 4:1, 6, 14; 5:14).

Much more thoroughly mystical than I Peter is the author of the Johannine writings; that is, the Fourth Gospel and the epistles of John. Whether the Fourth Gospel contains the views of its writer

only, or also the views of Jesus, who is represented as speaking so largely in it, in either case it is full, as the first epistle is too, of a mysticism very closely related to that of Paul. It is true that there is no such explicit reference to the author's own personal experiences as we find in the case of Paul, but there is the same fundamental idea of the Christian life as the divine life in man. By faith or love we become united to Christ in such an intimate way that he actually enters in and takes possession of us; or we enter into him and abide in him, and our life becomes of one substance with his (cf. John 3:5 ff.; 15:1 ff.; 6:48 ff.; I John 2:24 ff.; 3:24; 4:12 ff.; II John, vs. 9).

John's mysticism is of the same general nature as Paul's, involving a complete and permanent union between the believer and Christ, and so between the believer and God; for Christ is himself divine, and by his indwelling imparts the divine nature to those who are united with him. But when we turn to the fruits of this divine indwelling, we find a difference between John and Paul. The interest of Paul is controllingly ethical, and the principal fruit of the divine indwelling is the complete moral transformation of the believer, involving his perfect holiness and his release from the bondage of all law. In John, too, we have a marked ethical interest, and he lays considerable stress upon the sinlessness of the true Christian; but of Paul's magnificent gospel of liberty there is no trace. In fact, the Christian man is as much bound, indeed one may say more bound, by law than anyone else. But the difference between them does not lie simply here. We find in John more controlling emphasis than in Paul upon religious knowledge. The principal fruit indeed of our mystical union with Christ is knowledge of Christ and of God. "This is life eternal that they should know thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). The redemption brought by Jesus means to John primarily the transfer of believers from the realm of darkness to the realm of light. (Cf. I John 4:21; 8:12; 12:36, 46; 1:5 ff.)

John is thus closely allied to the principal mystics of all ages; for a controlling element in most mysticism is the emphasis upon knowledge of the divine, this knowledge being attained commonly by contemplation, carried in its highest stages even to ecstasy. So far as this John does not go, as Paul does in the passage already quoted

from II Cor., chap. 12; but his general emphasis on religious knowledge as the fruit of union with the divine is characteristically mystical.

Another mystic of the Pauline school, closely related in his fundamental conceptions both to Paul and John, is Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in the early part of the second century. He was a man of striking personality and fervid enthusiasm, whose letters are the most profound and effective writings of primitive Christianity outside of the New Testament.

There is an interesting passage of a decidedly mystical type in his Epistle to the Philadelphians (chap. 7):

For even though certain persons desired to deceive me after the flesh, yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God. For it knoweth whence it cometh and whither it goeth, and it searcheth out the hidden things. I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice, with God's own voice: "Give ye heed to the bishop and the presbytery and deacons." Howbeit there were those who suspected me of saying this, because I knew beforehand of the division of certain persons. But he in whom I am bound is my witness, that I learned it not from flesh of man; it was the preaching of the Spirit who spake on this wise: "Do nothing without the bishop; keep your flesh as a temple of God; cherish union; shun divisions; be imitators of Jesus Christ, as he himself also was of his Father." (Cf. also Eph., chap. 20.)

Ignatius, therefore, had had his mystical experiences as well as Paul, though there is no evidence that an initial experience, such as Paul's, created and dominated his theory of the Christian life, as was the case with the great apostle. At the same time, probably under Paul's influence, perhaps under that of John as well, he viewed the Christian life in as mystical a way as either of them did. To him as to them the Christian life means union with the divine (cf. Eph., chaps. 4, 10, 11, 15; Magn., chaps. 12, 14; Phil., chap. 7; Polyc., chap. 8; Trall., chap. 2; Rom., chap. 6).

But though he shared with Paul and John a mystical conception of the Christian life, Ignatius' interest was not primarily ethical like Paul's nor intellectual like John's, but physical. What he is chiefly concerned in is the endowment of our mortal bodies with immortality. The one thing he hates is death, the one thing he desires is life; not earthly life, which he is ready and eager to sacrifice in the arena at Rome, whither he is going to be thrown a victim to the beasts; but heavenly, and particularly eternal, life—life which will never end.

To him the great mark of contrast between divinity and humanity lies just here. Not that God is holy and man unholy, or God wise and man ignorant, but that God is immortal and man mortal. And so the chief fruit of our mystical union with Christ is immortality. We shall be holy, yes and we shall be wise, but above all we shall be immortal, for we shall be divine, when we have become completely one with, and so transformed by, Deity.

Closely connected with Paul, John, and Ignatius are the Gnostics, the most famous heretics and the ablest thinkers of the second century, who represent the later Platonic tendency in philosophy. The Gnostics, like all the later Platonists, were dualists, primarily interested in the redemption of the spirit of man from his material environment; and they became Christians because they were convinced that in Christianity were to be found as nowhere else the means of such redemption. Christ, they believed, in revealing God to man, had placed redemption within the grasp of those capable of receiving and understanding his message, and through the knowledge imparted by him he had brought about a union with God, which means ultimately a complete and permanent break with the flesh and the world, and an eternal life in the spiritual realm.

The Gnostic conception of redemption is as mystical as Paul's, for it involves the indwelling of a spiritual and divine nature, the possession of which alone makes escape from the flesh and an immortal life in the spirit possible. Thus Hippolytus (*Phil.*, X, 13) says of the Gnostic Valentinus: "He asserts . . . that Christ came down from within the pleroma to save the erring spirit who resides in our inner man, which they say obtains salvation on account of the indwelling Spirit." Again in Book V, chap. 7, a Gnostic of the sect of the Naassenes is referred to as follows: "For mortal, he says, is every generation below, but immortal is that which is begotten above, for it is born of water only and Spirit, being spiritual, not carnal." (Cf. also VI, 32; V, 8, 17.) Irenaeus says of Ptolemaeus and his followers (*Adv. Haer.*, I, 6, 2): "As to themselves they teach that they shall be wholly saved, not by means of conduct, but because they are spiritual by nature." Salvation is not an external gift, the reward of virtue, but a mystical process whereby the spiritual nature of man is carried back to the higher realm where it belongs.

The union with the divine by which the redemption is accomplished is effected principally by means of knowledge, which only the man possessed of a spiritual nature can gain. Thus Irenaeus (I, 21, 4) says of the Marcosians:

They hold that the knowledge of the unutterable greatness is itself perfect redemption. For, since defect and passion were caused by ignorance, the whole structure based on ignorance is destroyed by knowledge, so that knowledge is the redemption of the inner man. And this is not corporeal, for the body is corruptible, nor is it animal, for the soul is the fruit of defect and is as it were a habitation of the spirit. Therefore the redemption must also be spiritual. For the inner spiritual man is redeemed through knowledge, and the knowledge of all things is sufficient for him, and this is true redemption. (Cf. also I, 24, 4 and 6.)

The invocation of the Gnostic Marcus, uttered in connection with the Eucharist, ran as follows: "May that incomprehensible and unutterable grace, which is before all things, fill thy inner man and increase in thee the knowledge of it, sowing the mustard seed in a good soil." (Hippolytus, *Phil.*, VI, 40.) The knowledge thus emphasized is mystical knowledge in the fullest possible sense; not natural knowledge open to the ordinary man, but spiritual knowledge given to the spiritual man by revelation, mediated by holy rites of initiation, and involving an apprehension of elaborate mysteries hidden from all others. Compare the oath of the Justinian sect (Hippolytus, *Phil.*, V, 27):

I swear by Him who is above all, the Good One, to guard these mysteries and to divulge them to no one, and not to relapse from the Good One to the creature. And when he has sworn this oath, he enters in unto the Good One and sees what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man, and he drinks of the living water which is to them a bath, as they suppose, a fountain of living, bubbling water.

Compare also the following extract from a hymn of the Naassenes (*Phil.*, V, 8), in which Jesus is represented as saying:

On this account send me, O Father,  
 Bearing seals I will descend,  
 Whole aeons will I travel through,  
 All mysteries I will explain,  
 And forms of gods will show.  
 The secrets of the sacred way,  
 Called gnosis, I'll impart.

Of the Valentinians, Irenaeus says they teach that "the consummation will take place when all that is spiritual has been transformed and perfected by knowledge; that is, spiritual men who have perfect knowledge concerning God and Achamoth. And they claim that these are they who have been initiated into the mysteries" (*Adv. Haer.*, I, 6, 1 f.; cf. also Hippolytus, *Phil.*, V, 8). A good idea of the nature of the Gnostic mysteries may be gained from the third-century Gnostic works known as *Pistis Sophia* and the *Books of Jeu*. There is in Gnosticism also the same emphasis on magic rites, theurgic practices, and symbolism that we find so common in oriental theosophy, and in many other extreme forms of mysticism. (Compare Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I, 24.) An example of Gnostic symbolism may be found in Hippolytus, *Phil.*, VI, 43 f.

The Gnostics, or at least the majority of them, were the most consistent and thoroughgoing Paulinists of the early church, carrying Paul's dualism of flesh and spirit even farther than he carried it himself, and following him as no one else of the age did in his conception of the Christian life as a life of release from the trammels of the flesh and of liberty from the bondage of all law. At the same time, in their emphasis upon knowledge they were nearer to John than to Paul, and represented the same Greek tendency to find in the intellectual sphere the means of attaining the victory over all the ills of life.

Thus we have in the early church a group of men—Paul, John, Ignatius, and the Gnostics—differing in many respects, and the last repudiated and cast out as heretics, yet all mystics of a very profound type; mystics, not in the mere loose and general sense of the term, but in its strictest meaning; for they all represent a mysticism so complete as to involve a divine indwelling which brings about an actual transformation of the nature of man. It is clear that all these men are thinking in terms rather of substance than of personality. To be sure, they represent God and Christ as persons, but the salvation of which they conceive is accomplished, not simply by personal influence, and in the sphere of personal relations, but by physical indwelling. This, of course, is mysticism of the extremest possible type.

But mystics so thoroughgoing as these we find nowhere else in



the church of their day. In fact, the tendency which they represent was but isolated in that age. By the other early Christians known to us man and God are pictured in strictly personal relations. God is an individual, though almighty, person, the creator and ruler of the universe; and we are his subjects, related to him much as men are related to an earthly potentate. We may receive his messages and feel his influence, and his commands may be imparted to us; but he is without, not within, us, and our lives are human, not divine. It is the legal tendency which is in control of all of these writings, and it involves an externality of relation no less ethical than the tendency of Paul and the others I have spoken of, and in one sense no less religious; for the authority and will, and even the assistance, of God are recognized, but its governing principle is certainly not mystical. This legal conception of Christianity became a part of the thought of the church at large at an early day, and has existed ever since. And it is this idea which is chiefly controlling in the writings of the primitive church down to the close of the second century.

But it is interesting and instructive to notice that even where this tendency prevailed in primitive days, there was commonly a marked mystical element also present. It was not, as a rule, the same kind of mysticism which we have found in the group of writers already considered; not a metaphysical conception of divine indwelling, resulting in a real transformation of nature. It took the form, rather, of a divine influence making itself felt now and again, and more or less controllingly, in the life of the Christian; and it found expression in references to the Holy Spirit, the belief in whose immediate presence and activity is one of the most striking and characteristic features of the life of the primitive church. But this conception as it appears in early Christian writings needs examination. Just how much is meant by it, and in what sense and to what degree is it to be regarded as mystical? We can study it best in the Gospel of Luke, and especially in the Book of Acts, where it appears more frequently than in any other early Christian writing. It is clear, first of all, that the author of these two works conceived of the Spirit, not as the permanent possession of all believers, but rather as the special endowment of certain peculiarly distinguished persons. Thus

in the gospel the possession of the Spirit by Jesus is emphasized as something remarkable, with the evident assumption that he is thereby raised above the generality of his fellows (cf., not only Luke 1:35, but also 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18). And in Acts, chap. 6, the Christians of Jerusalem are directed by the apostles to choose seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom; and Stephen is spoken of in the same connection as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, as if he were thus distinguished from his brethren (cf. also 11:24).

Still more commonly the Spirit is spoken of as given either to distinguished persons or to believers in general, on particular occasions and for a particular purpose. Thus it appears frequently as the Spirit of revelation or prophecy. In the first and second chapters of the gospel Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Simeon receive the Holy Spirit, and immediately prophesy under its influence. In Acts, chap. 2, the words of Joel referring to the pouring-forth of the Spirit in the last days, and the prophesying which will result, are quoted by Peter as fulfilled at Pentecost. It is because Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit that he can look into heaven and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God (7:55); and for the same reason Paul can discern and denounce the character of Elymas the sorcerer (13:9). In Acts, chap. 11, the Spirit reveals to the prophet Agabus the coming of a famine; in Acts, chap. 21, the bonds that await Paul in Jerusalem; in 20:23 it testifies to Paul himself of the same bonds, and through the disciples of Tyre advises him not to go to Jerusalem (21:4).

Closely connected with such manifestations are the guidance and direction received on various occasions or in connection with particular emergencies and crises. In the gospel, chap. 12, it is said that the Holy Spirit shall teach the disciples what they ought to say when arrested and brought to trial for their Christian faith. So the Spirit directs Philip to join the eunuch, and after the interview is over carries him away again (chap. 8); instructs Peter what he shall do in response to the invitation to preach the gospel to Cornelius (chaps. 10, 11); directs the church of Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas for special missionary work, and sends them on their way (chap. 13); makes the older brethren of Ephesus overseers of the church (20:28); leads the apostles and elders of Jerusalem to write to the brethren at

Antioch about the terms of Christian communion (chap. 15); and forbids Paul to preach in Asia and Bithynia (chap. 16). The strengthening and inspirational influence of the Spirit is also emphasized, as in the first chapter of Acts, where its coming means the bestowal of power, which shall enable the disciples to be effective witnesses of Christ (1:8); and in chap. 4 it is the Spirit which enables Peter in one case, and the assembled disciples in another case, to speak the word of God with boldness. The comfort and joy brought by the Spirit are also emphasized, as in 9:31 and 13:52. The Spirit is also represented as an avenging power in Acts 5:9, with which may be compared Luke 3:6 and the parallels in Matt. 3:11. Finally, the coming of the Spirit is sometimes pictured as attended with strange phenomena, such as speaking with tongues and prophesying (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:46; 8:15 ff.; 19:6).

It is evident, in the light of all these passages, that the Spirit is not thought of by Luke as the abiding presence in which and through which a man becomes a Christian and lives all his Christian life. The influence of the Spirit, except perhaps in the case of certain eminent persons, is occasional only, not permanent (cf. also Luke 11:13, where "Holy Spirit" is substituted for the phrase "good things" of Matt. 7:11).

The same general idea appears in other primitive Christian writings, though much less frequently than in the Book of Acts. Thus, in addition to references in the parallel passages in Matthew and Mark identical with some of those already referred to, we have the promise of Christ, in Matt. 18:20, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them, the reference being to his presence in the meetings of the Christians for worship; and at the end of the same gospel occurs the promise that Christ will be with his disciples always even unto the end of the world, where the particular purpose of his presence is evidently to inspire and strengthen them in their work of teaching and witness-bearing. (Cf. also Matt. 12:28, where the phrase "Spirit of God" appears in place of "finger of God" of Luke 11:20.) In Heb. 2:4 the author refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost bestowed upon the early apostles, together with the signs and wonders and miracles wrought through them by God. The spiritual endowment of the Hebrew prophets

and of the apostles is referred to in I Pet. 1:11, 12, as also the special gift of the Spirit to those suffering persecution in 4:14. (Cf. also I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6.) In the Book of Revelation the author is taken possession of by the Spirit of prophecy, and the letters to the seven churches contain its message to those churches. Similar references are found also in the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, written almost at the end of the first century. Thus, when referring in chap. 2 to the early days of the Corinthian church, he says: "An abundant outpouring also of the Holy Spirit fell upon all." In chap. 42 he refers to the apostles as having gone forth to preach the gospel, "with full assurance of the Holy Ghost;" and in chap. 59 he implies that he believes himself to be speaking under divine inspiration. In the *Didache* also, which dates from the early part of the second century, the Spirit appears as the Spirit of prophecy. In chap. 11 it is said: "Any prophet speaking in the Spirit ye shall not try, neither discern, for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. Yet not every one that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord;" where the reference is apparently to speaking in an ecstasy, that is, in such a strange manner as to suggest the controlling influence of a supernatural power. (Cf. also references to prophets in the following chapters.)

In the *Shepherd* of Hermas, a prophetic work which consists of various parts written in Rome at intervals during the first half of the second century, the Spirit is mentioned frequently, and the common primitive conception of it appears in one passage (Mandate II), where there is an elaborate discussion of true and false prophecy, which may be compared with *Didache*, XI. On the other hand, there are some passages in Hermas which suggest the Pauline idea of divine indwelling; e. g., M. III, J, X, and Sim. IX, 24 f. At the same time, his general view of the Christian life is external and legal to the last degree, and as far as possible from the controlling conceptions of Paul, so that it is difficult to suppose that he really accepted Paul's profound mysticism, and on examination of some of his statements makes it clear that the Spirit as he pictured it was only one of many supernatural beings who took up their abode in man. This appears from the passage in Mandate V, already referred to, and also from the following words in the same mandate:

But angry temper is in the first place foolish, fickle, and senseless; then from foolishness is engendered bitterness, and from bitterness wrath, and from wrath anger, and from anger spite; then spite, being composed of all these evil elements, becometh a great sin and incurable. For when all these spirits dwell in one vessel where the Holy Spirit also dwelleth, that vessel cannot contain them, but overfloweth. The delicate spirit therefore, as not being accustomed to dwell with an evil spirit, nor with harshness, departeth from a man of that kind, and seeketh to dwell with gentleness and tranquillity.

When one conceives of the Spirit in this individual fashion as simply one of a number of supernatural beings who come and go in a man's life, it is clear that one is not moving in the same sphere of thought as Paul, to whom the divine indwelling means the real deification of the Christian's nature. Doubtless the influence of the latter's emphasis upon the divine indwelling was felt by Hermas, but it is his own and not Paul's conception which appears in his writings, and, while more nearly allied to the apostle's doctrine than the references to the Spirit in the other works we have just been considering, it is still of another type.

There are also in some of those other works a few passages suggesting the influence of Paul, as, for instance, II Tim. 1:14; 2:10; Titus 3:5; Heb. 3:14; 6:4 ff.; 10:29; II Pet. 1:4; Jude 19 ff.; *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, V, 1, 10, 23, 34, 42, where he quotes from the letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne describing the persecution which took place in those cities under Marcus Aurelius. To these may be added the interesting passage in II Clement, chap. 14, which runs as follows:

Wherefore, brethren, if we do the will of God, our Father, we shall be of the first church, which is spiritual, which was created before the sun and moon; but if we do not the will of the Lord, we shall be of the Scripture which saith: "My house was made a den of robbers." So therefore let us choose rather to be of the church of life that we may be saved. And I do not suppose ye are ignorant that the living church is the body of Christ, for the Scripture saith God made man male and female. The male is Christ and the female is the church. And the books and the apostles plainly declare that the church existeth not now for the first time but hath been from the beginning, for she was spiritual as our Jesus also was spiritual, but was manifested in the last days that he might save us. Now, the church being spiritual was manifested in the flesh of Christ, thereby showing us that, if any of us guard her in the flesh and defile her not, he shall receive her again in the Holy Spirit, for this flesh is the antitype of the Spirit. . . . This

therefore is what he meaneth, brethren, guard ye the flesh that ye may partake of the Spirit.

Such passages, however, in view of the general legal and external conceptions of the works in which they occur, cannot be regarded as evidence that the writers held the genuine mystical ideas of Paul, but are to be interpreted in the light of the common notion of the Spirit which they all share. The passages are so isolated, in fact, that they cannot be taken as representing the general position of the writers. The same may be said of the *Apology* of Tatian, written soon after the middle of the second century, in which there are also two passages of a mystical type (chaps. 13 and 15), while in general his tendency is very far from mystical. The Epistle of Barnabas, chap. 16, is interesting in this connection as showing how, in the absence of the underlying mystical conception of Paul, one might treat the idea of the divine indwelling.

In general it may be said that the mysticism of most of the Christians is of an altogether different sort from that of Paul, John, Ignatius, and the Gnostics. It involves a recognition of the presence and power of the Spirit, and in so far is mystical; but the Spirit is not the very substance of the Christian's constitution, as to Paul and his group, and not even the abiding power of the Christian life, but a divine visitant who comes to our aid under special circumstances, or who interferes in one way or another at certain crises, and who dwells more constantly with some than with others. The presence of the Spirit is a secondary, rather than a primary, element of the Christian life. It does not constitute its warp and woof, but its occasional adornment and embellishment. And this, too, even in an age when the power of the Spirit was felt with peculiar vividness.

It is clear that the kind of mysticism we have just been considering is rather of a personal than of a metaphysical character. Man is brought into direct relationship with God when he feels the immediate power of the Spirit; but the relationship hardly transcends that of personal influence, and at any rate involves no such transmutation and transformation of substance as we find in the thought of Paul and of his group. If among them we have a distinctly metaphysical idea, here all is of a purely popular and unphilosophical character. It may be called mysticism, inasmuch as it involves

direct communication between the spheres of divinity and humanity; but it is not of a metaphysical type, and should not be confounded with the many forms of mysticism in earlier and later days which are distinctly such.

In view of the sharp contrast we have seen existing between the mysticism of Paul, John, Ignatius, and the Gnostics, on the one hand, and that of the Synoptic Gospels, the Book of Acts, and other early Christian writings, on the other, there is difficulty in supposing that the teaching of Christ himself is accurately represented in this matter at once by the Synoptic Gospels and by the Gospel of John. If, then, we follow most modern scholars in drawing our portrait of Christ rather from the Synoptic Gospels than from John, we must conclude that, if he is to be called a mystic at all, it is not in the Pauline, but in the more general, sense of the word. That is, his mysticism is not of a metaphysical, but of a personal, type.

But can the Jesus of the Synoptists fairly be called a mystic? The question is worthy of a more extended treatment than can be given it in this article. It falls naturally into two parts: Was his own relation to God, as he conceived it, what may be called mystical? And did he teach a mystical relation between his disciples and God? Taking the latter question first, the number of passages in the Synoptic Gospels which carry a mystical suggestion is very small. One of them is Mark 13:11 (and its parallels Matt. 10:20 and Luke 12:12, with which may be compared an echo of the same saying in Luke 21:15). The words of Mark are as follows: "Whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye, for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit." Another passage is Matt. 16:17: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," whose authenticity is doubtful, as it does not occur in the parallel passage in Mark. But, waiving the question of the genuineness of the latter, in any case both of these passages suggest the same idea of the Spirit as guide and revealer which we have found common in the writings of the primitive Christians, and neither of them carries us farther. Two other passages, in which Christ speaks of his own presence with his disciples in a way to suggest the thought of John, are found in Matthew only, and are



both of doubtful authenticity. The one is Matt. 18:19, 20: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I among them;" which refers to the gatherings of the disciples for worship. The other is 28:19, 20: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you. And lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." In this the author has in mind the inspiration and help which the disciples receive from Christ for their teaching and witness-bearing. Even if we were to admit the genuineness of all these utterances, they would hardly carry us beyond the mysticism of the primitive Christians in general, and it is a very striking fact that among all Jesus' words recorded in the Synoptics, whether authentic or not, there should be so few which carry as far as that.

When we turn to Jesus' own religious experience, we face a question of insuperable difficulty. The words of Jesus himself bearing directly upon the subject are very few. In Luke 4:18 he is represented as quoting from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor," etc.—a quotation which he may well have applied to himself (compare Matthew's use of a similar quotation in 12:18 ff.); for that he regarded himself as a prophet seems clear from such passages as Mark 6:4 and Luke 13:33, and his belief in his own messiahship would naturally carry with it the conviction of the possession of divine inspiration for his work. And so there is no difficulty in supposing that he said, as recorded by Matt. 12:28: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (the parallel passage in Luke 11:20 has "finger" instead of "Spirit" of God). And the account given in Mark 3:22-30 may also be accepted, according to which he warns those who accuse him of demoniacal possession that they are guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, implying his own endowment by the Spirit. (In the parallel Matt. 12:24 ff., the matter is not quite so clear, and Luke 11:15 ff. is very different.) The most striking of all the passages bearing on our



subject is Matt. 11:27 (with its parallel in Luke 10:22): "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." Just how much this involves it is impossible to tell. The reference to knowledge gives it a peculiarly mystical sound, but the most that we can certainly say about it is that it gives expression to a fact which runs through all the gospels, and is the most characteristic feature in Jesus' life—his belief, namely, that he knew the will and purposes of God, his Father, as his fellows did not know them, and was sent by God to do his work. There are no other synoptic passages which carry us beyond this. The account of the baptism, to be sure, suggests that the divine Spirit came at that time to abide permanently upon Jesus, and the account of the virgin-birth involves a genuinely physical connection of Christ with God; but the latter tells us nothing of Jesus' own belief, and whether the former represents an actual vision enjoyed by him, or is only the figurative expression of an inner spiritual experience, we do not know. We may easily suppose that he came then to the conviction of his own messiahship and of his divine inspiration for the task; but more than this we cannot say. It is very significant that we have so little light upon the subject from Jesus himself. What we have in the Synoptic Gospels does not carry us beyond his conviction that he was called and inspired of God to do Messiah's work, and that his equipment included a knowledge of God's character and purposes greater than that of his fellows. This intimate acquaintance with God we may recognize as the dominating element in his religious experience. It enabled him to speak with authority, to state the conditions of entrance into God's kingdom, to forgive sin, to summon men to follow him in fulfilling God's will. If this is mysticism, then the Jesus of the Synoptics was a mystic. But it is to be distinguished from all forms of physical and metaphysical mysticism, such as held by Paul, John, Ignatius, and the Gnostics, and by all the most celebrated mystics of ancient and modern times. For the thought of Jesus moves in the personal, not in the physical or metaphysical, sphere. And since the term "mysticism" traditionally belongs in the latter, we shall probably best avoid misunderstanding if we refrain from calling Jesus a mystic. In saying this,

however, it is not meant that there was any lack of directness and immediacy in his relation to God; for such a oneness of purpose as he was conscious of may mean as complete a unity in another sphere as is involved in metaphysical identity. It is only meant that we do not find in his teaching, as set forth in the Synoptic Gospels, either the ecstatic tendencies (and this in spite of Oscar Holtzmann's book, *Was Jesu Ekstatischen?*), or the ontological implications of mysticism in general. The most significant of all facts about Jesus as a religious teacher is that he made communion with God consist, not in contemplation, or in ecstasy, or in the exaltation of so-called spiritual knowledge, but in coming into sympathy with God's purpose, and making it the controlling purpose of life.

I have said that in early days the presence and power of the Spirit were widely and vividly felt. But as time passed the consciousness of his activity steadily waned, and the literature of the second century in general shows far less trace of it than the literature of the first. That there were still prophets through whom the Spirit continued to speak was believed for some generations (cf., e. g., Justin, *Dial.*, 88:821; Irenaeus, II, 32, 4; III, 11, 9; and Celsus in Origen, *Contra Cels.*, VII, 11), but it was largely a theory, unrealized in fact; and it involved, even so, not the widespread endowment of earlier days, but at most only the rare gift of a prophet here and there in whom the spirit of the earlier age was supposed still to live on.

It was the spirit of this earlier age which the Montanists of the second half of the second century tried to revive. They constitute a very interesting and significant phenomenon in the history of the early church, striving as they did, in opposition to the growing secularity and externality of the church, to bring back the primitive enthusiasm, and the belief in the immediate presence of the Spirit. Montanus, the founder of the sect, and two companions, Priscilla and Maximilla, claimed to be divinely inspired prophets, through whom God spoke to his people, summoning them to live in a much more rigorous and ascetic manner than was common, in order to prepare for the speedy return of Christ. The Montanists thus believed in and emphasized the presence of the Spirit of prophecy, which takes possession of a man and speaks through him, the man himself being passive in its hands, and receiving his revelations com-

monly in an ecstasy. Thus Eusebius, quoting from an anonymous attack upon the Montanists, says of Montanus: "He became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the church handed down by tradition from the beginning." (With the Montanist prophesying as thus described may be compared, in spite of the opinion expressed by the anonymous author, the glossolalia of earlier days, and the prophets referred to in the *Didache*, XI, and Hermas, M. XI.) Montanus himself says, of the Spirit (according to Epiphanius, 48, 4): "Behold man is like a lyre, and I fly to him as a plectrum. Man sleeps and I awake. Behold the Lord is the one who puts the hearts of men into an ecstasy, and gives a heart unto men." And Maximilla exclaims (*ibid.*, 48, 12): "Do not listen to me, but listen to Christ;" implying that it is Christ who speaks through her. And again (according to Eusebius, *H. E.*, V. 16-17): "I am driven away from the sheep like a wolf. I am not a wolf; I am word and Spirit and power." And Priscilla says, according to Tertullian (*De exhort. cost.*, 10): "For purity works harmony, and they [that is, the pure] see visions, and turning their face downward they even hear audible voices, as salutary as they are occult."

The Montanists were thus mystics in the same sense in which so many of the early Christians were, believing as they did, in the presence and revealing activity of the Spirit, and emphasizing the continuance of prophecy; but they were no more mystical in their general conception of the Christian life than were the majority of those whom we have been considering. It is true that the divine indwelling is taught by Montanus, according to a saying quoted by Epiphanius, 48, 11: "I am the Lord God Almighty who dwelleth in man." But this really carries us no farther than the other passages, for the Deity may easily be thought of as dwelling in those through whom the Spirit speaks; and no farther than various isolated passages in primitive writings already referred to. And, in fact, the Montanists' idea of the Christian life was external and legal to the last degree, so that it was not the Pauline mysticism which they reproduced, but the common popular mysticism of primitive Christian circles, and even that only in a very limited degree.

The Montanists, though entirely orthodox in doctrine, and though genuinely primitive in their spirit and tendency, were condemned and cast out by the church of their day because, with their emphasis on the continuance of divine revelation, going in its practical teachings even beyond Christ and his apostles, they threatened the authority of the newly formed Scripture canon, and of the newly established Episcopal organization, which had been created in the fire of conflict, and to which the church owed its victory over the many feared and hated Gnostic sects. The condemnation was inevitable under the circumstances, but it meant the permanent passing of the primitive age, the age of revelation and inspiration, so that the great Origen, writing in the middle of the third century, could say that there were no prophets in his day, and could even deny that there had been any in the time of Celsus; that is, in the latter part of the second century (cf. his *Contra Celsum*, VII, 11). The church, in condemning the Montanists, elected to live without the spiritual guidance and illumination which it had once enjoyed; but it could not have taken this step had not the primitive spirit been already widely forgotten, and dependence upon external authorities of one kind and another become already widely prevalent.

Reference should be made finally to one of the most important figures of the early Christian centuries—a man who stood upon the confines of two ages, the primitive and the Catholic, and to whom, more than to any other, is due the historic theology of the church. I refer to Irenaeus, the great bishop of Lyons in southern Gaul, at the close of the second century. His significance lies in the fact that he made the combination between Paul's mystical doctrine of the Christian life and the legal view of the church at large. These two conceptions have already been contrasted. According to Paul and his group, the Christian life is the divine life in man. According to the others, even though the Christian may enjoy the influence of the Spirit in many ways, his life in its essence is human only, not divine. This latter tendency found its complete development and its extremest expression in Justin Martyr, and such apologists of the second century as Aristides, Athenagoras, and Theophilus, who represent salvation as a reward given in return for independent merit on man's part. Unless man's merit is his own, it is no merit. Of course, this idea

rules out completely Paul's mystical view; indeed, there is no place in it for mysticism of any kind. Belief in the continued activity of the Spirit of prophecy, bringing revelation and illumination, may still persist (Justin, for instance, mentions Christian prophets in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, chaps. 82, 88), but the Spirit cannot be given any real influence in the inception and promotion of the Christian life itself; and, as the primitive period passes, even the prophetic Spirit becomes more and more a denizen of a former age, and divinity seems to withdraw itself altogether. With Justin's strictly ethical, anti-mystical conception was combined by Irenaeus the mysticism of Paul and his group, the combination being made possible by the recognition of two stages in salvation, the one freedom from sin, or the control of the devil, the other the attainment of the divine life, which alone is complete salvation (cf. III, 18, 6-7; V. 21). Irenaeus was thus enabled to make a place for both the moral and the religious, for both the efforts of man and the activity of Christ. A man must work out his own salvation, which is a reward of virtue (cf. IV, 12, 3-5; 15; 33, 15; 37; 39, 1); yet he cannot attain true life unless his nature be transformed by the indwelling of Deity—an indwelling made possible by the incarnation of the divine Christ.

A few representative quotations will illustrate the mystical character of this side of Irenaeus' doctrine:

This, moreover, is his Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times was made a man among men that he might join the end to the beginning, that is man to God. Wherefore the prophets, receiving the prophetic gift from the same Word, preached his advent according to the flesh, through which a mingling and communion of God and man, according to the good pleasure of the Father, has taken place. (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20, 4.)

How can they be saved unless God is the one who has wrought out their salvation on earth? And how shall man pass into God unless God has passed into man? (IV, 33, 4.)

But as many as fear God and believe in the advent of his Son, and through faith establish in their hearts the spirit of God, such men as these shall justly be called pure and spiritual and alive unto God, because they have the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man and raises him up to the life of God. (V. 9, 2.)

Jesus Christ our Lord, who because of his great love was made what we are, that he might bring us to be even what He is Himself. (V, praef.)

Since the Lord therefore redeems us by his own blood, and gives his own soul for our soul and his own flesh for our flesh, and pours out the Spirit of the Father

for the union and communion of God and man, imparting God to men through the Spirit, and again attaching man to God through his own incarnation, and giving us firmly and truly at his own advent immortality through communion with God—all the doctrines of the heretics perish. (V, 1, 1.)

But now we receive a certain part of his Spirit, looking for the perfection and preparation of incorruption, little by little becoming accustomed to receive and bear God. (V, 8, 1.)

As those who see the light are within the light and receive its brilliancy, so those also who see God are within God and receive his brilliancy. Moreover, the brilliancy gives them life and therefore those who see God receive life. . . . Because it is impossible to live without life, but the means of life comes from participation in God. But participation in God is to see God and to enjoy his goodness. Men therefore shall see God that they may live, being made immortal by the vision, and attaining even unto God. (IV, 20, 5-6.)

For the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God. (IV, 20, 7.)

If a man will share in the benefits of the incarnation, he must not simply believe and obey; he must receive the sacrament of baptism, through which a new immortal nature is born within him, and must gain the nourishment to be had from feeding upon the body and blood of the divine Christ in the Eucharist. (Cf. I, 21, 1; III, 17, 10; IV, 18, 5; V, 2, 2.)

The transformation of man's nature brought about by his union with the divine extends even to his flesh, upon the salvation of which Irenaeus lays the greatest stress (cf. Book V, *passim*), in this respect all unconsciously disagreeing with Paul, to whom salvation meant release from the flesh and a new life in the spirit. But, in spite of this difference, the essence of Paul's mysticism, involving the transformation of man's nature by his complete union with the divine, is given by Irenaeus a permanent place in Catholic theology, while at the same time the un-Pauline legal tendency, which sees in salvation only a reward of human merit, is likewise conserved. It is true that in the combination Paul's magnificent gospel of liberty is completely lost, and all ethical meaning taken out of his doctrine of mystical union with Christ by its virtual reduction to a mere participation in certain sacraments. But the combination was fraught with consequences; for to it we owe ultimately the fact that Christianity has been through all the centuries at once ethical and mystical, a law and a religion.